Richmond District Review Report

March 4, 2003

District Name: Richmond School District

District Number: 38

Superintendent of Schools: Chris Kelly

Date of Visit: February 23 to 26, 2003

Team Chair: Nancy Wells, Superintendent of Schools, Mission School District

Team Members: Kas Angelski (Principal), Barbara Baydala (parent), Sheila Borman (Principal), Dr. Monty Bryant (Deputy Superintendent of Schools), Veronica Barlee (Ministry of Education), Judy Connor (Vice-Principal), Ross Elm (Teacher), Sandra Peel (Curriculum Coordinator), Dennis Des Lauriers (Assistant Superintendent of Schools).

Context

The purpose of the district review is to provide feedback and recommendations to the district, the Ministry of Education and the public regarding the district's work in improving student achievement by:

- Reviewing district school and school achievement data.
- Reviewing the district accountability contract and school plans to improve student achievement.
- Making recommendations to the Board and to the Minister about improving student achievement.
- Identifying promising practices that will assist other districts and schools in their efforts to improve student achievement.

The Provincial accountability initiatives commenced through legislation in May 2002, and the team recognizes that the Richmond School District is in the early stages of their district accountability work.

The Richmond Review took place in the improvement context of the seven goals of their 2002-2003 Accountability Contract, including:

> *GOAL*
> *"Establish understandings and a process whereby all schools, in concert with the school district, set annual performance plans which are focused upon the improvement of student achievement".*
>
> *RATIONALE*
> *"The establishment in the 2002-2003 school year of such a process is fundamental to concerted action among all schools and the school district in setting annual performance plans which concentrate specifically and directly on the improvement of student performance and achievement".*

The Richmond School District Review is one of twenty reviews being conducted by the Ministry of Education in 2002/2003.

Summary of Process

The District Review Team initially met with representatives of the Richmond School District and discussed student achievement and the district accountability contract. District representatives included: the Chair of the Board of School Trustees, the Past President of the Richmond District Parents' Association, the President of the Richmond Association of School Administrators, the President of the Richmond Teachers' Federation, the Vice-President of the local Canadian Union of Public Employees, the Superintendent of Schools, the Associate Superintendent of Schools, two Assistant Superintendents of Schools, and the Director of Instruction (Learning Services).

The discussion of the district's accountability contract was based on ten "key areas of inquiry", provided by the Ministry. Each area of inquiry is based on current school and district effectiveness and improvement research. The ten "key areas of inquiry" also provided the framework for the discussion with school teams and the report by the District Review Team to the district, the Ministry of Education and the public.

The District Review Team then met with twenty school teams to review and discuss student achievement. Membership and size for the school teams varied across the district but included students, parents, teachers, staff, school principals and vice-principals.

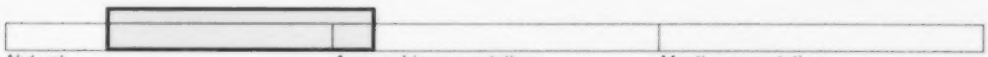
Schools visited by the team included fifteen of the forty elementary schools (Brighouse, Cook, Currie, Diefenbaker, Ferris, Gilmore, Grauer, Hamilton, Homma, Kidd, Kingswood, Mitchell, Spul'u'kwuks, Tait, Wowk) and five of the ten secondary schools (Cambie, McNair, McRoberts, Richmond, Steveston).

In addition to the visits, the team also reviewed the following information: the Richmond School District's Accountability Contracts for 2001/2002 and 2002/2003, School Growth plans from all Richmond schools and additional materials provided by the Richmond School District, including the district's *Directions* documentation.

The District Review Team appreciated the district's hospitality and advance preparation for the team visit. In schools, team members were warmly welcomed and appreciated engaging in meaningful dialogue with school teams about improving student achievement.

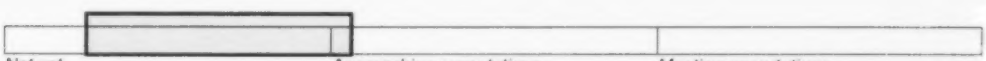
Observations in Key Areas - Focus on Student Achievement

1. *Goals: Improving districts have a strong instructional focus. This focus is made visible in clear goals for improving student achievement.*



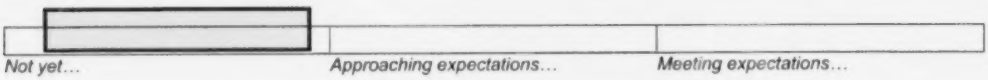
- The goals in the district's accountability contract are not clearly focused on improving student achievement.
- Several schools have goals for improving student achievement.

2. *Rationale: Improving districts have a thorough and connected set of reasons based on evidence for the selection of their student achievement goals.*



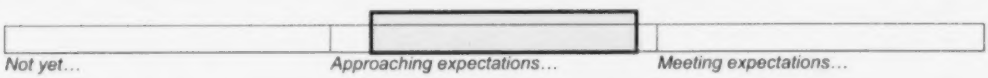
- District goals reflect priorities established in the district.
- The rationale for the seven district goals is not clear.
- Several schools have goals based on an understanding of student achievement data and community expectations.

3. *Data: Improving districts are considering at least three sources of evidence including classroom, school and district/provincial data. The analysis of this evidence has informed the selection of the district goals.*



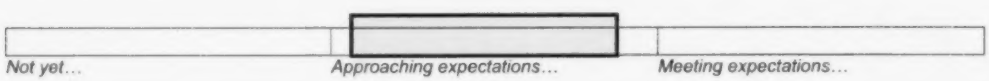
- The data used is not clearly linked to each goal in the district accountability contract.
- Classroom, school and provincial data sources are used to develop school and district goals but are not consistently evident across the school district.

4. *Strategies: Improving districts have a well-organized, focused improvement plan in place. The strategies selected to achieve the goals are an intelligent blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking.*



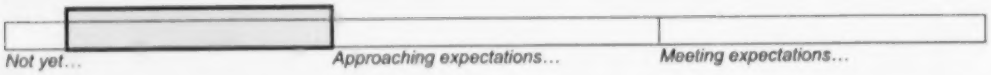
- Many improvement strategies are evident throughout the district and are strongly supported with commitment and enthusiasm by staff.
- Many schools use practical, research-based strategies and link these to professional development.

5. *Structures: Improving districts have aligned structures---resources, time, organization---to get the results they want. This includes effectively differentiating resources in the areas of highest need for improvement.*



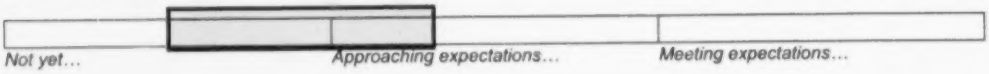
- The district has initiated structural changes to support some goals.
- Several schools have adjusted structure, organization, resources and staff time in support of school goals.

6. *Results: Improving districts get improved student learning results---at the classroom, school and district levels.*



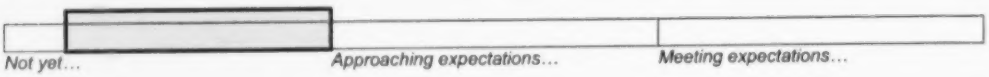
- Well-defined baseline data and targets are not evident at the district level.
- Baseline data and targets are evident at several schools.

7. *Communication: Improving districts communicate and make public their improvement goals and the progress being made.*



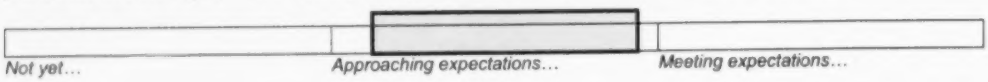
- The district communicates regularly with their diverse school community.
- The communication is not specific to improvement goals and progress.
- Several schools communicate to education partners, the district and the wider school community about their improvement goals and the progress being made.

8. *Partnership: District and School Coherence Improving districts have a dynamic and interactive strategy for connecting school and district goals. School uniqueness and school-district directions are both valued.*



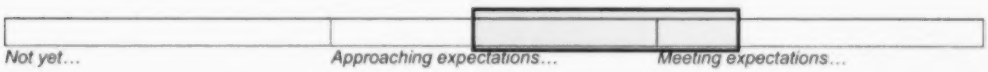
- District and school goals are not closely connected, with the exception of the "Human and Social Development" goal.

9. *Partnership: District and Parent Involvement Improving districts work as a team with parents, including specific groups of parents, on improving student learning.*



- Several groups of parents have a role in goal-setting and improvement strategies at the district and school levels.
- The district has provided support and leadership for School Planning Councils.
- At the school level, schools are reaching out to a diverse range of parent groups.

10. *Leadership / Teamwork: Improving districts are led by district leaders with a clear vision for and commitment to school improvement and improving student achievement. Principals, vice-principals, teachers, parents and student leadership is encouraged and systematically developed---with a focus on improving student learning.*



- There is ample evidence of shared leadership at both the district and school levels.

Strengths

- Collegiality and trust are evident throughout the district.
- District staff and the Board of School Trustees are respected by, and respectful of, all partners in the school system.
- The district provides a wide variety of professional development opportunities for all education partners.
- Shared leadership is evident and valued.
- District-wide communication is rich and varied. In particular, Richnet is an effective communication tool.
- Knowledge of performance standards has the district poised to use them as a powerful assessment tool to improve student achievement.

This district clearly has the potential to create powerful connections between school and district goals that would fully realize its capacity to improve all achievement for all students.

Promising Practices

- The district's strong commitment to working with schools in realigning structures to support the achievement of students with diverse learning needs.
- The emerging Richmond network of schools focusing on performance standards.
- School-based practices which enable educators to meet during instructional time to focus on improving student achievement.
- The district's recognition of, and support for, student leadership practices.

Recommendations

The team acknowledges that *Directions* is a well-developed framework for the district. However, it is through the accountability contact that the district will achieve a primary focus on student achievement.

GOALS:

- Continue the district work on completing the Performance Assessment Plan. Consider working from the ten "key areas of inquiry" in designing the School Performance Plan template to be implemented for the 2003/2004 school improvement plans.
- Reduce the number of goals in the accountability contract and provide a clear focus on academic achievement for all students.

DATA/RATIONALE

- Outline how multiple sources of data and rationale inform district goals.

STRATEGIES

- Demonstrate more clearly the strategies to be used in the implementation of district goals.

STRUCTURES

- Identify the structures being used to implement district goals.

RESULTS

- Develop performance measures that include baselines and targets.

COMMUNICATION

- Use the many district methods of communication to better inform the public about school and district goals and the progress being made.

DISTRICT AND SCHOOL COHERENCE

- Demonstrate connections between school and district goals.

Priorities

- Implement the accountability contract goal to "*Establish understandings and a process whereby all schools, in concert with the school district, set annual Performance Plans which are focused upon the improvement of student achievement*" for the 2003/2004 district accountability contract.